

Legislate to prevent people from changing Welsh house names

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 17 Tachwedd 2020
Petitions Committee | 17 November 2020

Reference: RS20/14079-4

Petition Number: P-05-1032

Petition title: Legislate to prevent people from changing Welsh house names.

Text of petition: There is a pattern throughout Wales where new owners are changing their house names into English.

- There is no need to go far to find the evidence!
- Little by little, the country is losing its heritage.
- This must be stopped for the sake of future generations, whatever their language.



1. Context

There is currently no specific legislation prohibiting individuals from renaming their property in Wales. However, there are some specific procedures, policies and guidance that individuals considering renaming their property should follow. The responsibility for such matters rests with local authorities.

The debate around whether action is required to prevent people from changing Welsh place-names and property names to English is not new. However, the discourse around the issue has gathered momentum in recent years, with an increasing perception among many that Welsh history, culture and language is gradually being eroded. In 2015, for example, [Anglesey Council](#) unanimously approved a motion calling on the Welsh Government to significantly strengthen local authorities' powers to protect Welsh historical names. More recently, well known broadcasters, including Huw Edwards and Tudur Owen, and a number of politicians have also been active in the debate on social media platforms, as reported in this [BBC Wales news article in July](#) (accessed 14.10.2020).

Among the recent examples of Welsh place-names being 'anglicised' are Porth Tre Castell in Anglesey, often being referred to as 'Cable Bay', and Llyn Bochlwyd in Snowdonia, which is often referred to as 'Lake Australia'.

There are also examples of properties being given new English names or promoted as such. Faerdre Fach farm in Llandysul is one well known example, now promoted as 'Happy Donkey Hill'. Another, more recent example is *Traeth Bychan Heights* luxury holiday complex being developed in Anglesey. This property appears on the [List of Historic Welsh Place Names](#) as *Glyn-Llifon*, dating back to the 19th Century. Following concerns raised locally about the name-change, the company behind the development has [reportedly confirmed the historical name Glyn-Llifon will be preserved](#) (BBC Wales article accessed 14.10.2020).

2. Background

2.1. Public Health Act 1925

[Sections 17-19 of The Public Health Act 1925](#) gives local authorities statutory responsibility for the naming of streets and alterations to street names and house numbers. Local authorities are also responsible for providing and maintaining the

definitive address database, known as the [National Land & Property Gazetteer](#). When new properties and streets are developed, they should be included in this database as soon as possible and always before the building is completed.

The legislation does not extend to the naming of properties, but as local street naming authorities, local authorities are responsible for ensuring the property address is 'official'. Failure to do so could cause issues for the property owner as the address may not be recognised by the Royal Mail, delivery companies and utility companies. Difficulties may also arise in relation to registration for voting, and emergency services may experience difficulties in locating the address in the event of an emergency.

Most local authorities will have a designated webpage with guidance and procedures for changing the name of a property in their area. Local authorities may also provide online application forms and details regarding the costs involved. [Cardiff Council](#) and [Flintshire Council](#) websites are included as examples. Some local authorities, such as [Ceredigion Council](#) and [Gwynedd Council](#) provide additional guidance in order to encourage home owners to use Welsh names on their properties, however, this is not compulsory.

2.2. The Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016

[Section 34 of the Historic Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#) makes provision for the Welsh Ministers to 'compile and maintain a list of historic place names in Wales'. This work has been undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales on behalf of the Welsh Ministers.

3. Senedd Action

In January 2017, Dai Lloyd MS won the ballot to propose a Member's Bill: [Development of the Protection of Welsh Historical Place Names Bill](#). Dai Lloyd MS provided the following [Explanatory Memorandum \(PDF 195KB\)](#) prior to the [Plenary debate](#), which was held on the 15 March 2017.

The Welsh Government did not support the Bill, and it did not receive leave to proceed.

As part of its 2017 inquiry into the [Historic Environment](#), the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee considered the List of Historic Place Names of Wales. It stated that the Welsh Government should keep the matter

under “active review and should be willing to introduce further protection for historic place names if the current list does not prove effective”.

A [petition calling on the Senedd to protect and promote Welsh place-names](#) was submitted in 2018. The specific action the petitioner called for was:

Old Welsh place names/building names should be protected by law; and new developments should have a mandatory Welsh name in order to preserve our unique culture and language.

In June 2020, the Petitions Committee considered a similar petition calling on the Senedd to [take action in order to revert to Welsh language spellings of place-names](#). The specific action the petitioner called for was:

to take action and change these Anglicised forms of Welsh names – throughout Wales – and restore their original Welsh spellings.

Places such as Trevor (from Welsh Trefor) near Wrexham are not only undermining, but obscure the etymologies of such names! This is surely unacceptable.

4. Welsh Government action

Following the petition in 2018 to protect and promote Welsh place-names, the Welsh Government [outlined its activity in this area](#) (PDF 198KB) in response to the petition. It noted that, following the passing of the [Historic Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#), the Welsh Government has introduced a statutory list of historic place names. It states:

Statutory guidance requires local and National Park authorities and Natural Resources Wales to take account of the list when their functions involve naming or renaming places. This includes the naming or renaming of streets, properties and other places, either directly or by another party. The intention is that the operation of the list and the statutory guidance together will lead to a reduction in the number of formal changes to historic property names.

However, the Welsh Government noted:

...these measures stop short of providing formal protection for historic place names. Detailed consideration was given to providing statutory protection for historic place names during the development of the 2016

Act, when a number of representations similar to the current petition were made. However a number of significant issues, including enforcement, potential additional burdens on local authorities and human rights, militated against it.

In its response to the petition submitted in 2020 on reverting to Welsh place-names, the Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language (at the time) (PDF 266KB) stated that:

The Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2019 also places a duty upon the Welsh Ministers to ‘compile and maintain a list of historic place names in Wales’. The List of Historic Place Names of Wales is maintained on our behalf by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. It now contains nearly 700,000 entries, but it is a dynamic resource and will continue to grow. It is a valuable resource for tracing the changing forms of Welsh settlement names for it aims to record any historic place names that can be confidently geo-located prior to 1919. The list can be found here:

<https://historicplacenames.rcahmw.gov.uk/>

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.